

Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan

SUMMARY - MANAGER FOR A DAY WORKSHOP 3/15/2003, TREMPEALEAU MIDDLE SCHOOL, TREMPEALEAU, WI

Lists of Issues, Concerns, Additional Discussion Notes, and Potential Solutions Discussed

Seven “Manager for a Day” workshops were conducted to obtain “potential solutions” for issues facing the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge Complex. These all day workshops, attended by citizens and agency personnel, occurred as follows:

Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge:

January 4, 2003, Prairie du Chien High School, Prairie du Chien WI
January 11, 2003, House of Events, Savanna IL
March 8, 2003, Winona Middle School, Winona MN
March 12, 2003, Cartwright Center, UW – La Crosse, La Crosse WI, Interagency Team
March 22, 2003 Onalaska Middle School, Onalaska WI

Driftless Area National Wildlife Refuge

February 20, 2003, Central State Bank, Elkader IA (evening only)

Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge

March 15, 2003 Trempealeau Middle School, Trempealeau WI

WORKSHOPS: HOW THEY WORKED

The workshops were facilitated by Dr. Onnie Byers or Kathy Holzer, Conservation Breeding Specialists Group, Apple Valley MN, except the Elkader IA workshop was facilitated by refuge staff. Each workshop began with a presentation by Refuge Manager Don Hultman on the

recorder, and timekeeper. All concerns, notes, and solutions were entered into laptop

“sideboards” or legal requirements under which refuges must operate, with detailed reference to the “National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997.”

This presentation was followed by Refuge Planner Eric Nelson, who gave a summary of 12 public meetings held in August and September 2002 where citizens expressed hundreds of concerns “about the future management of the refuge.” These many concerns were then consolidated into 12 issues that “Manager for Day” participants were asked to address. The issues were printed as one-page “Issue Fact Sheets” that provided background materials and several “major concerns” citizens and staff had expressed about each issue.

The facilitators then began the workshop process by randomly assigning participants to working groups of 6-8 people. The groups each selected 5 of 12 “Fact Sheet” issues that they would address throughout the day. They could add more issues if desired. The exception to this procedure was at Prairie du Chien WI where participants addressed 11 of 12 “Fact Sheet” issues and added others. Groups selected their top five issues for discussion by having each participant place up to 5 “sticky dots” next to his or her highest priority issue written on flip charts. Each working group selected its own facilitator, presenter,

computers by refuge staff. At day’s end, presenters for each group told the entire

workshop their concerns and “potential solutions” to issues they had selected. Participants were encouraged to listen carefully, know that all opinions were valid, respect each other, not allow one person dominate, and recognize that differences of opinion would be voiced but not necessarily resolved at the workshop.

A Note about the Issues

Workshops held at Prairie du Chien WI, Savanna IL, Winona MN, Onalaska WI, and UW-La Crosse all dealt with the same basic 12 issues related to the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. Workshops at Elkader and Trempealeau each had issues specific to Driftless Area NWR and Trempealeau NWR, respectively.

Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge

1. The Issue: Prairie and Oak Savanna Restoration

Main Concerns

- 1) There may be a concern with removing large numbers of trees from the Refuge landscape, regardless of whether or not the trees are invasive and non-native. *(Added by Group)* Do over a period of time, keep the native trees, remove the ones that are invasive.
- 2) The prairie on the Refuge is a unique habitat and will become more so in the next fifty years.
- 3) Economical and publicly accepted means must be found to remove the trees. *(4-9 Added by Group):*
- 4) Removal of large numbers of trees could cause temporary disruption to woodland dependent species.
- 5) Goat prairies off-refuge are at risk of loss.
- 6) There is a lack of education about restoration projects.
- 7) Existence of pines on the Refuge.
- 8) Downwind smoke impact from prescribed burns needed to maintain prairie and oak

savanna.

- 9) Permanent impact on wildlife that use woodlands.

Additional Discussion Notes

- 1) Funding = comment that this is something that could be done – perhaps use volunteers.
- 2) Removal of the pine plantations will affect all other animal populations – i.e. owls, rodents, etc.
- 3) Are there other species that could be added?
- 4) Remove black locust - removal of other invasive species and black locust.
- 5) Prairie is a treasure – it is unique.
- 6) Fringe areas are very important to wildlife – the pine habitat would be lost.
- 7) Discussion about maintaining goat prairie on private lands near the refuge. It can be kept open with burning. Can Refuge help with staff and dollars?
- 8) Pre-settlement vegetation was chosen because the Fish and Wildlife Service has chosen that as a standard where it would be feasible. This was chosen because the vegetation then would be the vegetation most suitable for that area and would be native species.
- 9) Concern with removal of large areas of trees – do smaller areas at a time – black locust a problem – Don’t destroy the whole refuge!
- 10) Going to need a good fire management plan.
- 11) Important to maintain a unique habitat type (prairie).
- 12) Staff and dollars limit how much can be done.

Potential Solutions

- 1) Keep the natives and keep removing the invasives.
- 2) Develop a strategy with time.
- 3) Approach a Friends group for volunteers.
- 4) Make a concerted effort to get volunteers involved – and schedule work days.
- 5) Attract locally people who might want the black locust for firewood – in some of the larger black locust stands.
- 6) Emphasize NOT removing the pine trees.
- 7) Replanting – involve school groups? And other environmental clubs, etc...this

involves the community and educates the public, gives them more ownership.

- 8) Remove the black locust and restore those areas to prairie.
- 9) Funding.
- 10) Conduct gradual habitat restoration through targeting specific areas that are closest to their original state and using them as demonstration areas to educate the public about the need for restoration.
- 11) Hire a park ranger to conduct education with school kids about native habitats and the importance of stewardship.
- 12) Coordinate with the County Youth Development to educate students about native habitats.
- 13) Have a commercial timber sale.
- 14) Educate the public to deal with public perception of removal of trees (burns/cuts).
- 15) Prepare a plan for areas to be treated (cut). Do only small areas at a time – Don't destroy more than one acre per year at a site. Multiple sites can be cut each year.
- 16) Develop an adequate Fire Management Plan.
- 17) Use a "Cat" Dozer root rake to eliminate resprouting.

(Added by Group) Most Feasible Solutions

- 1) Workdays – volunteer days.
- 2) More public awareness.
- 3) Come up with a long range plan for the prairie.

2. The Issue: Invasive Species

Main Concerns

- 1) The present distribution and rate of spread of the various invasive species throughout Refuge habitats has not been documented. This is particularly true for purple loosestrife and European buckthorn.
- 2) Mechanical, chemical and biological control techniques for species such as black locust, European buckthorn, and leafy spurge have achieved varying degrees of success.
- 3) Without additional funding, *(Added by Group)* and more public awareness, existing

Refuge resources will be diverted from ongoing programs to allow for control of exotics.

- 4) Prior to European settlement, upland areas on the Trempealeau NWR consisted of native prairie and oak savanna, which are becoming rare in southwest Wisconsin. Black locust and leafy spurge are a serious threat to these habitats.
- 5) Spread of exotic and invasive species onto the Trempealeau NWR from off-refuge sites is a *(Added by Group)* major concern. *(6-10 Added by Group)*
- 6) Removal of any other type invasive and exotic such as zebra mussels, carp, needs to be addressed, etc.
- 7) There is a lack of education about invasive/exotic species.
- 8) Risks of control mechanisms. Additional research needed.
- 9) Unaware public can spread invasives.
- 10) Define impact of invasives species

Additional Discussion Notes

- 1) Better biological controls are needed.
- 2) No chemical that will kill spurge that won't kill anything else.
- 3) Better surveys for exotics.
- 4) Continue to manage for native species.

Potential Solutions

- 1) Add a park ranger to handle education about invasive species.
- 2) Continue current mechanical, chemical and biological control techniques.
- 3) Hire a temporary biologist to determine the extent of the current problem, control existing invasive species, determine the effectiveness of current control measures, and identify new exotics.
- 4) Conduct research to find successful education and control methods used in other areas.
- 5) Establish a rough fish removal project – long term.
- 6) More public awareness is needed about the invasives.
- 7) Use volunteers – have a volunteer coordinator work with office personnel.

- 8) Conduct inventory – LTE for 6 months.
- 9) Train and use volunteers.
- 10) Contract with commercial anglers to remove carp.
- 11) Educate public about dangers of invasive species.
- 12) Monitor impacts of control mechanisms (obvious and hidden).
- 13) Better Surveys – What’s out there?
- 14) Emphasize research into Biological Controls/and Specific Chemical Controls (similar to control for sea lamprey).
- 15) Provide additional funding for control of exotics.

(Added by Group) Top Three

- 1) Establish rough fish removal projects.
- 2) More public awareness.
- 3) Use volunteers.

3. The Issue: Minimizing Human Impact

Main Concerns

- 1) Rules and regulations designed to reduce disturbance to wildlife and people are not followed by all visitors. *(Added by Group)* As visitation increases, more problems are bound to arise.
- 2) There is a concern that too much of the Refuge is open to public use and that more areas should be closed seasonally, such as certain water areas during fall migration.
- 3) There are significant archaeological sites on the Refuge with potential for “treasure hunting.” *(Added by Group)* These areas should be protected.
- 4) As population growth in the local area continues, more people will visit the Refuge and the potential for human impacts will increase.
- 5) *(Added by Group)* Lack of education and information to sensitize humans to impacts.
- 6) Lack of rest areas during spring and fall migration.

Additional Discussion Notes

- 1) The question was raised, how can it be a refuge and the Refuge allows hunting. The

general public does not understand why hunting is allowed.

- 2) Very concerned that duck hunting be limited to handicapped and/or limited such as special events.

Potential Solutions

- 1) Encourage hunting to be more specialized – such as handicapped and/or “first” hunts for both deer and/or waterfowl.
- 2) Continue as is...but try to re-emphasize the purpose of the Refuge.
- 3) Work at educating the public.
- 4) Educate.
- 5) Increase enforcement.
- 6) Designate closed areas during spring and fall migrations and other seasonal use considerations.
- 7) Remove signage for archaeological sites on visitor map in refuge office.
- 8) Basic current user info/#s
- 9) Develop plan to facilitate future increase in number of users so as to minimize impact on resource.

(Added by Group) Most Feasible

- 1) Encourage Special Hunts.
- 2) Re-emphasize mission.

4. The Issue: Water Level Management of Navigation Pools (Drawdowns)

Main Concerns

- 1) Concern from adjacent railroads must be considered in any future water level management development. The Burlington Northern & Santa Fe (BNSF) RR is concerned about the spring head differential against their dike bordering the Refuge, and there could be opposition from the Canadian National Railroad regarding the use of their right-of-way as an interior dike.
- 2) Excessive depths of organic soil could limit options for construction of additional interior dikes.
- 3) Little is known of rough fish populations and their impacts on vegetation in Refuge impoundments.
- 4) Groundwater seepage may preclude

overwinter drawdowns in impoundments, which limits the ability to control rough fish.

- 5) Effective water level management is dependent upon the availability of required funds and staff to operate and maintain pumps and water control structures.

Additional Discussion Notes

- 1) The green group voted democratically for Water Level Management because there was a 3 way split [in priority] between Water Level Management, Horseback Riding, and Managing the Deer Population.
- 2) Can managing the water level control some of the other invasive species, such as the purple loosestrife.
- 3) The lock and dam system has changed the entire water level and flowage in relation to the Refuge.
- 4) Identify effective ways to controlling the rough fish population.
- 5) There was a lengthy discussion about reducing the rough fish population.
- 6) Manage the water levels for best habitat – aquatic growth.
- 7) Policy for back flooding during major flooding.
- 8) Control rough fish coming in.
- 9) Cost of drawdown – not in base budget.
- 10) Drawdowns need to continually done to promote aquatic growth.

Potential Solutions

- 1) Identify financial benefits of reducing the rough fish population for other interest groups.
- 2) Group discussed perhaps adding another pumping station – bigger and able to pump more water.
- 3) Maintain and preserve present islands with riprap.
- 4) Establish a rough fish removal program.
- 5) Provide base level funding for drawdowns.
- 6) Formulate policy for Back Flooding Policy for use during major floods (Also control Rough Fish from entering).
- 7) Utilize drawdowns to eliminate rough fish and utilize spot Rotenone treatments.

(Added by Group) Most Feasible Solutions

- 1) Financial benefits for volunteers.
- 2) Maintain present islands.
- 3) Rough fish removal.

5. The Issue: Refuge Access

Main Concerns

- 1) For every day the entrance road is closed, it is estimated that 50 fewer people visit the Refuge. When both entrances are closed to vehicles, about 225 fewer visits occur each day.
- 2) Solving the problem of access during flooding will involve consultation and coordination with adjacent landowners, the public, and local units of government.
- 3) Modification of the existing entrance road must include consideration of effects on upstream and downstream hydrology, and will likely involve some filling of wetlands adjacent to the existing road.
- 4) Alternative solutions to the access problem will likely require major funding.
- 5) There are safety concerns with using the Marshland access as the Main Refuge Entrance.
(6-8 Added by Group)
- 6) There isn't a direct route for bike access between Marshland and the Refuge entrance.
- 7) Should we be correcting problem to encourage additional visitors?
- 8) Impact on Great River State Trail users if road paved (safety, e.g. faster traffic and access).

Additional Discussion Notes

- 1) The Refuge has funding for a feasibility study about access on the whole refuge; it's on hold waiting for an easement at the present entrance.

Potential Solutions

- 1) Seek major funding to improve the present access point, by possibly building a bridge

or putting in culverts.

- 2) Seek funding to study the feasibility of creating a direct route for bike access between Marshland and the Refuge entrance.
- 3) Create bike lane on the road when it is improved.
- 4) Decrease speed limit to make safer for bicyclists.
- 5) Consider leaving the road as is.
- 6) Management decisions should reflect primacy of wildlife and natural systems.
- 7) Create bike lane on the road when it is improved.
- 8) Decrease speed limit to make safer for bicyclists.
- 9) Consider leaving the road as is.
- 10) Management decisions reflect primacy of wildlife and natural systems.

6. The Issue: Community Involvement

Main Concerns

- 11) There is a lack of understanding (*Added by Group*) and interest in the local communities as to the purpose of the Refuge, and in many cases, people are unaware the Refuge exists.
- 12) The Refuge lacks the personnel needed to provide outreach to the local communities (*Added by Group*) and information to visitors at the Refuge. *There is a lack of volunteer training.*
- 13) Opportunities are being missed to include the community in Refuge projects and to develop an avenue for community support. (*Added by Group*) Change community to public at large...more broad – There is often much confusion between the park and the Refuge.
- 14) The public has expressed an interest in increased assistance on private lands to address sedimentation issues in nearby rivers and creeks. (*Added by Group*) Broaden to just other than sedimentation issues.
- 15) (*Added by Group*) Better publicity is needed for major changes on the refuge. – such as dollars being spent on major development of

dikes, etc...

Additional Discussion Notes

- 1) The volunteers staffing the deck need more training in bird identification, etc.
- 2) Many landowners/farmers aren't aware that sedimentation is an issue.

Potential Solutions

- 1) Getting the word out to the schools.
- 2) Flyers put out once a month for volunteer opportunities, and events.
- 3) Use the media.
- 4) Nature notes – newspaper column.
- 5) Solicit more membership for the Friends.
- 6) Have the Friends do more.
- 7) Contact more conservation groups.
- 8) Do more public outreach.
- 9) Devoted volunteers would like have the opportunity to have their own set of keys.
- 10) Lead Volunteer for the office.
- 11) The volunteers staffing the deck need more training in bird identification, etc.
- 12) Many landowners/farmers aren't aware that sedimentation is an issue.

(*Added by Group*) Top Three Items That Could Be Done Without a Lot of Money

- 1) Publicity
- 2) Fliers
- 3) Media
- 4) Increase Friends Group Membership
- 5) Conservation Groups
- 6) Volunteer for Office
- 7) Community Service for Youth

7. The Issue: Off Refuge Impact

Main Concerns

- 8) A derailment from one of the adjacent railroads could cause potentially toxic substances to be deposited in refuge wetlands causing mortality to fish and wildlife.
- 9) Numerous power lines on and adjacent to the Refuge result in an undetermined number of bird strikes.
- 10) Equalizing water levels against the BNSF

railroad dike, such as occurred in 2001, could cause significant losses to vegetation.

- 11) Expansion on State Highway 35 to four lanes could result in filling of wetlands. In addition, hazardous spills are an existing possibility.
- 12) Continued sedimentation in the bed of the Trempealeau River and Pine Creek upstream of the Refuge could eliminate water inflow to the water control structure that supplies the C2 impoundment.

Additional Discussion Notes

- 1) Plan for handling a contaminant spill.
- 2) Interagency coordination of above plan.
- 3) Prevention planning with Railroad, etc.
- 4) River sedimentation problems and effects.

Potential Solutions

- 1) River Sedimentation Relief – Dredge Trempealeau Bay.
- 2) Develop an Interagency Coordinated plan for handling a toxic spill.
- 3) Preplanning with Railroad/Towing Companies/Highway Interests.

8. Environmental Education

Main Concerns

- 1) Personnel/Staffing/Connections.
- 2) Missed Opportunities.
- 3) Locked building on weekends.
- 4) Lack of materials/programs.
- 5) Delivery system – how to get info out to the public.
- 6) Counter public's non-awareness and insensitivity.

Potential Solutions

- 1) Hire an environmental educator.
- 2) Develop materials and programs.
- 3) Outreach to schools, communities, agencies, and broader.
- 4) Provide year-round educational/informational shelter (staffed by volunteers) for refuge visitors.
- 5) More informational signs for self-guided experiences.
- 6) Complete visitor indoctrination area

(attached to existing office building.)

- 7) Coordinate refuge environmental program with EEK programs on WIDNR web page.
- 8) Coordinate environmental ed programs with Perrot State Park.
- 9) Develop environmental awareness.
 - birders
 - school groups
 - bicyclists
 - civic organizations
 - deer hunters
 - tourists
 - general public

9. The Issue: Managing the Refuge's Deer Population

Main Concerns

- 1) The quality of the habitat on the Refuge is the main consideration when determining deer management needs.
- 2) A segment of the public wants to be able to come to the Refuge and see deer frequently. *(Added by Group)* What's best for the Refuge?
- 3) There is a need to set a goal for deer numbers on the Refuge, based on carrying capacity studies.
- 4) An overabundance of deer could increase the risk of disease in the herd. *(Added by Group)* CWD is a main concern in managing the deer population

Additional Discussion Notes

- 1) The public wants to see deer. One group says they used to see 80 to 100 deer and now they are lucky to see one.
- 2) Consider a few more deer for viewing.
- 3) Refuge used to have a reputation for having lots of trophy bucks and great numbers of deer – now the success rate is down to less than a 20 % rate.
- 4) Is there a relationship to the number of deer and the food source?

Potential Solutions

- 1) Monitor the deer population and keep it to a low rate until more is known about CWD.

- 2) Use handicap and senior hunt rather than open to the entire public.
- 3) Come up with a compromise on the number of deer – have a balance on no deer and too many deer.

(Added by Group) **Most Feasible Solutions**

- 1) Special senior, handicap and youth hunt permits instead of hunters' choice permits.
- 2) Compromise on the deer population.

10. The Issue: Trapping

Main Concerns

- 1) It is a concern of local trappers that because trapping is not part of the "Big Six," it will not continue to be supported as a Refuge activity.
- 2) There is a potential for humans and domestic animals to come in contact with traps, especially land sets, during the trapping season, resulting in injury.
- 3) The process of furbearer harvest and use has been severely criticized and protested by animal rights groups. There is always the possibility that the Refuge trapping program will come under such an attack.
- 4) Trapping is an economic activity and therefore, per compatibility requirements, must contribute to management objectives to be allowed.

Additional Discussion Notes

- 1) Let refuge maintain the option of trapping as a management tool
- 2) Need to educate the public on the necessity of trapping.
- 3) Expand program to include other species such as coyotes and raccoon.

Potential Solutions

- 1) Maintain trapping as a management option on the Refuge.
- 2) Educate the public on the need for a trapping program.
- 3) Consider some predator trapping for upland predators on birds and eggs.

11. The Issue: Waterfowl Hunting

Main Concerns

- 1) There are no waterfowl hunting opportunities for the general public on Trempealeau NWR.
- 2) There is a concern that if a public waterfowl hunt is allowed, the disturbance impact could cause waterfowl use of the Refuge to decline. This could negatively affect wildlife observation opportunities on the Refuge and waterfowl hunting in the surrounding area.
- 3) The large influx of migrant birds in the Fall attracts many visitors to the Refuge. Conflicts may develop between bird watchers and waterfowl hunters.
- 4) *(Added by Group)* There is opposing public opinion about opening the Refuge to general waterfowl hunting.
- 5) Administration and management of a limited waterfowl hunting program could require a large investment in funds and staff time for issuance of permits, law enforcement, additional parking, etc.

Additional Discussion Notes

- 1) One participant doesn't believe in killing any waterfowl or animals.
- 2) Mission of refuge would be questioned if waterfowl hunting were allowed.
- 3) There are already plenty of hunting opportunities around here; need to provide a stop-over for migrating waterfowl.

Potential Solutions

- 1) Continue with the present waterfowl hunting programs for youth and hunters with disabilities.
- 2) Don't change current waterfowl hunting status. Closed area status helps hunting in surrounding areas.

12. The Issue: Horseback Riding

Main Concerns

- 1) Demand for use of Trempealeau NWR for horseback riding appears to be increasing.
- 2) Horses can have severe physical impacts on trails and refuge habitats due to their size

and weight.

- 3) The presence of horses often conflicts with wildlife-dependent uses since hikers, families, photographers, and others may find horses disturbing, intimidating, and unpredictable.
- 4) Accommodating horseback riding on the Refuge will require additional staff time and funds to manage appropriately.

Additional Discussion Notes

- 1) Could partner with a horseback riding group. Would like to avoid an “us v. them” situation. People who use facilities should be required to maintain the facilities. Have designated trails. Have limitations – during some times of the year. Would like to ride on the dike roads. There is a growing number of people interested in horseback riding and limited number of places to ride.
- 2) It would be an extra headache for the staff. Adds a management piece. Need access for trucks with horse trailers.
- 3) Horses dig up the surface and cause erosion problems. Bring in exotic species in their feces.
- 4) So many other areas should be addressed before horseback riding. If try to have exclusive areas for each activity (hiking, horseback riding, etc.), would lose. Wildlife

should come first.

- 5) No horses.

Potential Solutions

(No time remaining for Potential Solutions)

13. The Issue: Bike Trail *(Not chosen by any of the groups for discussion)*

Related Comments made during discussion of Refuge Access and other issues:

- 1) There isn't a direct route for bike access between Marshland and the Refuge entrance.
- 2) Seek funding to study the feasibility of creating a direct route for bike access between Marshland and the Refuge entrance.
- 3) Create bike lane on the road when it is improved.
- 4) Decrease speed limit to make safer for bicyclists.
- 5) Do not expend a lot of funds on an improved bike trail.
- 6) Coordinate funding with other refuge agencies if access road is upgraded (w/bikes, etc.)